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ABSTRACT

The National Union Catalog (NUC), a repository of the cataloged holdings of major research libraries of the United States and Canada, has significance in the area of Hungarian studies despite special problems encountered in the separation of these cards from those in other languages and in editing Hungarian names and the use of accents. The Union Catalog is a valuable reference tool for researchers in Hungarian studies as it provides a bibliography of holdings for major United States and Canadian libraries in easily available book form. It also aids in cataloging, reference, and as a selection tool for library acquisitions. (CWM)

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THE NATIONAL UNION CATALOG AND ITS ROLE IN REFERENCE AND RESEARCH IN THE HUNGARIAN FIELD

BY:

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I will discuss briefly the National Union Catalog and its significance in the area of Hungarian studies.

The National Union Catalog is a repository of the catalogued holdings of the major research libraries of the United States and Canada, and some rare items held in the collections of selected smaller and specialized libraries. It is maintained in the Library of Congress.

First I would like to give a brief history of the National Union Catalog. Its origin goes back to the beginning of the century. The collection of the cards started in 1909 when the cards from the largest U.S. libraries, that of the Library of Congress, Harvard University, New York Public Library and Chicago's John Crerar Library were collected and interfiled in the Library of Congress. During the first quarter of the century the catalog was maintained by the Card Division and there was no attempt made to edit or revise the cards to avoid duplication or errors. By 1926 the collection grew to 2 million cards as more and more libraries participated. The resulting demand for a more comprehensive Union Catalog was presented by the American Library Association to John D. Rockefeller Jr. and as a result he gave the Library of Congress a gift of $250,000 ($50,000 a year for 5 years) for extending the catalog as rapidly as possible in order to locate at least 1 copy of every important book in American libraries. At the end of this 5 year period the Library of Congress established a permanent union catalog.

The steadily growing number of titles recorded, and increasing use by other libraries to learn the location of the copies wanted for interlibrary loan, resulted in 1948 in its redesignation as the National Union Catalog. The growth and value of the catalog has steadily increased

since then and now it contains more than 16 million cards. In the meantime, the Library of Congress had placed in over one hundred other libraries "depository sets" of its own printed cards which were kept up to date by the addition of new cards printed. The maintenance and upkeep of these sets became very expensive and cumbersome. Therefore, in 1941 a Committee of the Association of Research Libraries sponsored the publication of the Library of Congress catalog in book form thereby making it generally available to all libraries throughout the world. This project was completed in 1946 and the "Catalog of books represented by the Library of Congress printed cards issued to July 31, 1942" became an important reference and bibliographic tool. It was so popular that further supplements followed, and in 1950 it was divided into two parts, an author and a subject catalog.

The success of this publication was so great that the American Library Association appointed a Subcommittee to investigate the possibility of expanding this catalog to include not only the Library of Congress cards but also the holdings of the National Union Catalog and publish it in book form. In 1956 the publication of "National Union Catalog, a cumulative author list," started which included titles published after 1956.

This development marked the turning point in the long history of efforts toward the bibliographic control of library resources in the United States. It made even more evident the need for editing and publishing a list of the pre 1956 imprints. This work was started in 1968 under the sponsorship of the Union Catalog Subcommittee of the American Library association and when completed it will include a listing of a large part of the documents of human knowledge and civilization. It covers a span of 500 years from the invention

of printing and publishing of the Guttenberg Bible up to 1956. I would like to speak a little more about the National Union Catalog pre 1956 imprints because it is regarded as one of the greatest bibliographies in the world, certainly the largest, and also because that is where I earn my living, as an editor.

The publication of the pre 1956 imprints was planned to take 10 years but according to our best estimate it will come to an end only in about a year and a half from now when we will reach the letter Z, the end of the alphabet. Plans are already made to start a supplement. When the main series is completed it will consist of more than 650 volumes and approximately 11 million entries. It is printed in England by Mansell Information/Publishing Limited, by a unique technique in which the original cards are sense-marked and photographed by a specially designed camera and reproduced.

The catalog is a listing of main entries plus cross references and essential added entries. The cataloging of the material was done by different libraries over 50 years. During this time the cataloging rules and the quality of cataloging have changed very much. Our aim is to find all the possible entries for a work and unite them under one main entry, the one probably correct according to the American Library Association's 1949 cataloging rules, and to make necessary added entries to facilitate finding the main entry. The quality of the cards varies greatly. We have old faded handwritten catalog cards and the most up to date computer produced ones. The information given on the card varies a great deal, from detailed bibiographic description to extremely sketchy cards with only the author's surname, often misspelled, and a brief title. If there is an LC card available the work is relatively easy, but in editing other Library's

cards sometimes quite extensive research is necessary. At the bottom of the card the location symbols are indicated. The first library listed is the one that submitted the card. The complete list of symbols of the libraries is published in a separate volume. An abbreviated list appears in each volume published.

Which are the libraries which contributed the most Hungarian cards? The Library of Congress comes first, then New York Public and Cleveland Public Libraries. Harvard, Cornell and the Hoover Library of Stanford University are represented with many Hungarian entries. The problems we have encountered in editing these cards are numerous.

The major problem is that it is impossible to separate the cards by languages, thus every editor has to handle a multitude of languages, except if there is a greater number in a specific group, like the entries under Hungary or Budapest or titles beginning with magyar, or authors with common names like Kovacs or Szabo. Fortunately we were able to solve this problem by hiring people with different language backgrounds and expertise. Thus more or less all areas are represented. Our section is like a miniature United Nationa where English, German, French, Spanish, Russian, Hungarian, Polish, Estonian, and Lithuanian editors are working peacefully side by side. We try to consult each other if a difficult card comes up.

There are special probelms in editing the Hungarian cards. As we all know the order of the Hungarian names is different from that of any other language, except Chinese. Last name comes first followed by the first. It is difficult for a non-Hungarian to recognize the last and the first names.

Many libraries have sent in cards entered under the author's first name like Jozsef, Timar, Istvan, Szabo. Even Library of Congress had a small thesis collection, later transferred to the Center for Research Libraries in Chicago, cataloged that way. Most of the editors and reviewers show the Hungarian cards to me and I am able to correct many similar and other errors. Thus, fortunately, Vörös Csillag termelőszövetkezet dijnyertes bikája (prize winning bull) is not represented in the National Union Catalog as an author of a book, and we did not become the laughing stock of Hungarian librarians.

Another difficulty in editing the Hungarian cards is the use of accents. Hungarian is not as well known a language as German, and certain other languages, which also use accents. There is less likelihood that a non-Hungarian editor or cataloger would recognize the mistakes caused by the omission of accents. This can result in major errors in filing. If we consider the magnitude of the Union Catalog we can understand that several hundred cards would be filed between Török and Torok and in the printed work they could be in different volumes.

These are just a few problems which I encountered during my work at the National Union Catalog pre 56 imprints. I did not even mention the difficulty with common surnames, because it is not unique in Hungarian, it is the same in every language. It is as difficult to distinguish between the Kovacses and Molnars or Szabos, as it is between the Müllers and Smiths. Up to quite recently there were not enough reference sources for the Hungarian material. But that has changed in the last few years. We now have quite a few good biographical sources published in Hungary and elsewhere.

What is the significance of the National Union Catalog for the researchers of Hungarian area studies and teachers of Hungarian language and literature? The Union Catalog is a unique and excellent research and reference tool for all area studies. It is the first time that a bibliography of the holdings of the major U.S. and Canadian libraries is easily available in book form in all cultural centers of the United States and the whole world. However, we have to keep in mind that there is no subject approach to a specific topic because it is only an author catalog. There is no language breakdown either. You can not check what material is available in Hungarian. If you want to look up what books by a specific author are available in any United States Library or you have a bibliography and you want to see whether the items listed are available in the United States or Canada it is a tremendous help.

Recently I received a request to suggest some books about the private sector of nationalized agriculture in Hungary and in the other socialist countries on the basis of the NUC. This is not possible, in view of the facts I have just mentioned.

In interlibrary loans, precious time can be saved because previously the inquiries had to be sent to the Library of Congress and I think the answer did not always come very fast. All this is eliminated because the printed volumes are available all over the world. As far as I know there is one copy in the Szechenyi Library in Budapest too.

For libraries it is very useful in cataloging. Not every library has a cataloger who understands Hungarian. The cards can be copied by an subprofessional or typist.

It is also an excellent selection tool on the basis of which the acquisitions librarian can decide which book would be of great value to his or her library. It is useful in ready reference if you want to find out an author's date of birth, but you don't have any biographical source for Hungary, as probably many United States libraries don't, the Union Catalog is available everywhere and the needed information can easily be found.

As a conclusion, I would like to urge you to go and take a look at the volumes of the Union Catalog in your own library. I hope that my presentation will be useful to those of you who are already familiar with it and to those who did not know about this important bibliography.